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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

REPORT NO.

## INFORMATION REPORT

CD NO.

25X1

COUNTRY Estonia (USSR)

DATE DISTR. 15 May 1953

SUBJECT Soviet Freight Car Service Rules and Practices

NO. OF PAGES 2

PLACE  
ACQUIREDNO. OF ENCLS.  
(LISTED BELOW)DATE  
ACQUIREDSUPPLEMENT TO  
REPORT NO.

DATE OF

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Railway Systems/Repair of Cars

1. There are about 50 railway systems in the USSR. Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania all had one system each, whereas certain larger centers of population would have more than one system. Leningrad, for instance, has two systems known as the Leningrad System and the October System (named after the October revolution). There was a Northwest Railway System, a Southeast Railway System, and, of course, many others. The Minister of Railroads in Moscow supervised all the systems. In 1923 the USSR bought approximately 500 locomotives from Sweden. These passed through Estonia. Many of these locomotives are still in use. There are two factories building locomotives and cars in Leningrad. The largest of these is the Butilov factory.

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2. Ordinarily, every owning system is responsible for the repair of its cars. Cars are automatically checked every five years at a designated place. If a car breaks down, it may be taken to the nearest roundhouse. Every roundhouse has facilities for simple repair work. Each system is broken into precincts. Repairmen from the precinct in which the car broke down are sent out to make repairs on the spot if the car cannot be moved. If a car belonging to a system other than the owning system breaks down, repairs will be made by the system in which the car is located and the owning system will be billed. There is no difference in the extent and effectiveness of repairs made by the owning system and repairs which may be made when a car is on another system. This is true, of course, only if proper spare parts are available.

Operation of Cars

3. Between World War I and World War II, couplings on all cars were changed to the automatic type used in the US. The train dispatcher of each system must see that by 1800 hours his cars, or an equivalent number of cars belonging to other systems, are back in his own system. Cars are freely interchanged between systems so long as each system has its proper number of cars back in its own system by 1800 hours. If, however, cars are delayed in unloading or for some other cause are not back in their system at the specified time, the system in which the car is located will have to pay the owning system for its use. Payments between systems are made on a monthly basis and the dispatchers are very careful to see that their books are pretty closely balanced at the end of the month. Ordinarily, the time allotted to unload a car is eight hours. Of course, during the period from 1941-44, cars were unloaded on a 24-hour basis. Each system has many dispatchers. A dispatcher and assistants usually have a precinct of about 150 miles.

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4. There are certain exceptions to the somewhat free exchange of cars between systems. Refrigerated cars and oil cars have special importance. These cars are handled much more carefully and special red freight sheets are used for the refrigerated cars in contrast to the white sheet for the regular freight car. On the red sheet is shown the exact time of arrival, time taken in loading, etc. The dispatchers are very careful to see that these cars are back in their own system by 1800 hours each evening since demurrage on these cars is much higher than on regular freight cars. If no load can be found for a car in another system, it will be sent back empty and not held up for a load. Cars will not be sent back to the owning system with a load under their norm. They will either be fully loaded or empty. A minimum is charged for each loaded car and if a car has, say, only 10 tons instead of a maximum 40, it will be charged for a normal load. Another reason cars are not sent back partially loaded is that the owning system will have more of its cars tied up in unloading operations than would be the case if the cars were sent back empty. An exception to this rule was the loading practices of the army who would often leave a car half loaded if another one was brought up before they were finished loading the first one.
5. Cars may be temporarily transferred from one or more systems to another system to meet regional traffic peaks at the discretion of the Ministry of Railroads. For instance, if the Ministry of Agriculture needed additional cars in a particular location during the harvest season, the Agriculture Minister would ask the Minister of Railroads for the cars and the Minister of Railroads would assign them.
6. The only penalty for keeping cars beyond the permitted time, [redacted] is the payment of demurrage [redacted]. It was the same in all of Estonia. The demurrage, of course, does vary to some extent on different types of cars; for example, the heavy platform cars, the refrigerated cars, and the oil cars have a higher demurrage than the regular freight cars.
7. There is little outward difference between cars of railway ownership and cars assigned to industries. The cars are often disguised to keep everyone from knowing what cars were assigned to a particular industry. Certain factories or plants would be given code names, such as Red Star, and the code name would be placed on the cars used by the plants. The general public, however, would not know what code name designated a particular plant.

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